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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to meet the needs of elementary school students making the transition to middle school. Incoming grade 6 students from five K-5 feeder schools were receiving insufficient articulation from the new middle school to permit them to make a smooth transition. An intervention program was developed and instituted which included middle school visitation days, a student handbook, parent orientation evenings, an open house, student-produced media presentations, pen-pal letters, and parent information booklets. Pre- and post-test surveys of new grade 6 students found that student attitudes were more positive about the middle school experience after participating in the program than prior to it. It was also found that the number of student schedule change requests declined. Five appendixes contains copies of pre- and postintervention guidance counselor and student surveys and recommendations from "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century." (MDM)

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Establishing Articulation Practices For Middle School Students

by

Margaret Higgins

Cluster 47

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A Practicum II Report Presented to the
ED.D.Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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1993

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Bob Rainey
Bob Rainey

Principal

Indian Trails Middle School

Winter Springs, FL

October 4, 1993

This practicum report was submitted by Margaret Higgins under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

2-3-94
Date

Roberta Silfen
Dr. Roberta Silfen, Adviser mes

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the support I received from the administration and staff at Indian Trails Middle School who willingly agreed to actively participate in all phases of implementation of this practicum. The encouragement and words of appreciation expressed were greatly appreciated. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Silfen who provided me with consistent positive feedback and, in so doing, reminded me that positive encouragement is the best teaching technique.

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ABSTRACT

Establishing Articulation Practices for Middle Schools: Higgins, Margaret M., 1993: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Middle School / Articulation/ Guidance / Transition Programs.

This practicum was designed to meet the needs of the elementary school students as they make the transition from the elementary level of education into the middle school level of education. Specific strategies described include visitation days, student handbooks, parent orientation evenings, open house, student produced media presentations, pen pal letters and parent information booklets.

This writer administered pre and post surveys to the students in the sixth grade at the site; organized tour guide itineraries for student visitation; supervised a grade level pen pal exchange; produced both a student handbook and a parent information booklet; designed student invitations, handouts for chorus, band, and gifted program information brochures; directed student media production involving a slide tape presentation and a student skit for visitation day.

Analysis of the data revealed that the participants reduced the number of schedule change requests. Students attitudes on feeling prepared to make the choices as they entered their middle school level of education also showed a positive improvement.

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12-18-93 Margaret M Higgins

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The work setting for the writer was a newly opened middle school in a suburban setting located in the southeastern part of the United States. The school opened in the fall of 1992.

The population of the school numbered approximately 1200 students, serving grades six, seven and eight, with 400 students at each grade level. The population was predominately a caucasian middle class population with a minority population of ten percent Hispanic, four percent Black, and three percent Asian. The Exceptional Education programs offered at the school included Emotionally Handicap, Specific Learning Disabilities, Physically and Mentally Handicap, Speech, Limited English Proficiency and Gifted.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The faculty and staff at the writer's work setting represented a balance of highly experienced teachers and recently hired teachers. Since the principal appointed for administration of the new site was an experienced principal at an existing middle school, the principal was permitted to invite a percentage of his previous school's faculty to join him in the new school. It is obvious that these selections were based on positive attitude, professional growth and excellent teaching success. The new staff members were representative of recently hired teachers within the county. Due to recent budget concerns, staffing formula changes resulted in staff reductions at all county schools in June of 1992. Those most recently hired personnel throughout the county, in the order of their dates of hire, were placed at the new school of the county if their certification met the necessary requirements. Thus, the work setting could be described as a newly formed and energetic staff who appeared both open and flexible to innovation.

The role of the writer was that of resource teacher of the gifted for all three grade levels. Responsibilities included the writing and implementing of student's individualized education plans for the gifted program. Responsibilities also involved direct contact with students, in small groups, for eighteen week sessions, during which time affective education was emphasized. The writer was also a sixth grade advisement teacher.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Incoming students from the five feeder schools were receiving insufficient articulation from the new middle school to permit a smooth transition from the elementary school. This vulnerable and emotionally charged age group were entering into a new environment without preparation or assistance with the decisions that they were forced to make concerning their next level of education. In brief, the failure to establish articulation practices for students transferring from the elementary level to the middle school level was causing a stressful situation for both staff and students at the new middle school and the five elementary feeder schools.

Problem Documentation

Evidence of the existence of the problem of insufficient articulation at this site is supported by observation, interviews and surveys.

In the opening address for the 1992-1993 school year, the principal stated that one of the priorities for this school year was to establish articulation practices for the five elementary schools that fed into the school.

An interview with the guidance department (See Appendix A) at the site yielded the following information. Of the 386 students who entered the school as sixth graders, approximately eighty of them required scheduling changes during the opening weeks of the academic school year. Further questioning revealed that the majority of these schedule change requests involved three specific student populations. Specifically, chorus students, band students, and students in the gifted program showed the highest percentage of students involved with schedule change requests. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Results of Guidance Questionnaire For Schedule Change Request By Sixth Grade Students.

Total Schedule Requests made by Sixth Grade Students	Schedule Requests Made Involving Sixth Grade Band Students	Schedule Requests Made Involving Sixth Grade Chorus Students	Schedule Requests involving Sixth Grade Students in Gifted Classes	Schedule Requests involving Other Concerns
80	28	21	23	8

An interview with guidance department (See Appendix A), also revealed that no parent meetings took place prior to the opening of the new academic school year for parents of students in the five feeder schools.

Results of a survey completed by sixth grade students (See Appendix B) during the 1992-1993 showed that 86 out of 386 felt they were unprepared for the decisions they made on their schedule choices prior to beginning their middle school experience. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Results of Survey Completed By Sixth Grader Students on Scheduling Decisions They Made in Fifth Grade.

Total Number of Students Surveyed	Total Number of Sixth Grade Students Who Expressed They Felt Unprepared to Make Scheduling Choices Prior to Entering Middle School.
386	86

Causative Analysis

It is the writer's belief that the failure to establish clear and concise articulation practices at the site has multiple causes. The most obvious of these causes is the simple fact that the school was new. Students who previously were scheduled to attend existing middle schools within the district were redistricted to attend the new school within the county. Unfortunately, the actual building site was unfinished as the academic year for the 92-93 began. This forced the students to attend a split session and share a campus for the first nine

weeks of the 92-93 school year.

The second major cause for the lack of articulation practices was due to the uncertainty of faculty and staff appointments. Cutbacks in government funding within the county resulted in large numbers of personnel placed at the new site, not by choice, but by necessity. This personnel shifting was not finalized until the end of the academic school year in 1992, eliminating any possibility for articulation practices to be implemented.

Review of the Problem to the Literature

Review of the literature reveals the history of the middle school concept which was designed to meet the needs of students between the ages of 10 and 15. (Doll, 1986)

The beginnings of the middle school concept date back to 1960, when a growing dissatisfaction with the Junior High concept began to emerge. While initial surveys administered in 1968 described easing overcrowding as the primary purpose of the middle school concept, by 1988 the focus had changed to providing programs best suited to this age group. (Alexander & McEwin, 1989b).

In 1966, Donald Eichorn coined the word "transescent" to describe the stage of development which starts at puberty and extends to early adolescence. The major characteristics of transescent is physical change, decrease in adult influence, and a decrease in brain growth. (Toepfer, 1986)

Although many schools have moved from a junior high configuration (grades 7-9) to a middle school configuration (grades 6-8), they do not exemplify the true middle school philosophy unless additional modifications such as scheduling and grouping practices have been implemented that take into consideration the needs of transescents. (Binko & Lawlor, 1986)

Several authors have developed lists of practices cited by practitioners as important components of the middle school concept. These practices can be placed into the categories of organization, school climate, curriculum, and teaching methods. George & Anderson, (1989) listed the following assumptions commonly associated with in the middle school philosophy.

1. The necessity for a caring climate in response to the emotional upheaval experienced by middle grade students.
2. Purposeful accommodation for the erratic physical development patterns in learning environments and athletic involvement.
3. Needs for increased awareness and involvement of students, parents, teachers and community regarding needs of adolescents.
4. Consideration for innovative transitional designs maximizing differences in learning rates and styles.
5. Need for balance between cognitive and affective education.

6. Involvement of faculty members in school decisions.
7. Frequent and sustained contact between teachers and students.

A similar list of recommendations were also cited in the 1989 report of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's Task Force on Education of young Adolescents. (See Appendix C)

The concept of team teaching as been viewed by many as the cornerstone of the middle school concept. (Schurr, 1989) Bondi, (1981) cites advantages of team teaching for both students and staff. He states that team teaching provides greater attention to individual students and enables teachers to share ideas and information.

Measurable achievement gains have been cited as positive results of following the true middle school concept. George & Oldaker (1986) report that in a national study of 130 middle schools, there was consistent academic improvement, increased scores on state assessment tests, significant improvement in discipline, reduction in tardiness, truancy, school vandalism, theft, office referrals, suspensions and expulsion. While all of the above gains reflect positive results using the middle school concept, it should be noted that the data collection used for the survey was one of self report, which is a questionable survey technique. (George & Oldaker, 1986)

The transition from elementary to middle school can be

described as both difficult and exciting. Students view this transition as either a risk or an opportunity. (Epstein & MacIver, 1990a) While some studies find that most students make most changes in their lives successfully, (Offer, Ostrov, Howard, and Atkinson, 1988), some studies suggest that students have serious problems making multiple, simultaneous transitions. (Simmons, Blyth, VanCleave, and Bush, 1979).

There is a growing awareness that stress is a fact of life, and that preadolescence is more stressful than it used to be. With two parent careers and single parent families, time spent with adult interaction has been reduced to a few minutes a day. These changes in the role of the traditional family life has resulted in an increase in stress levels for this age group. Preadolescents are forced to become more and more self reliant. This places a great amount of responsibility on their shoulders to make decisions and care for themselves. This responsibility can be a major source of stress. (Brophy, 1986)

CHAPTER 3

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of the writer was that the incoming sixth grade students enter middle school with a greater awareness of the expectations and choices of their middle school experience.

Expected Outcomes

There were a total of four expected outcomes as a result of this practicum. The first one was that the principal, who in the fall of 1992 expressed articulation as a priority item of concern with feeder schools, would no longer express this as a need, but would instead view the articulation used by the middle school as an area of strength.

The second expected outcome was that the guidance department would observe a decrease in the number of scheduling change

requests by incoming sixth grade students.

The third expected outcome was that the post survey, administered to sixth grade students, would reflect a decrease in the number of students who respond that they felt unprepared for the choices that they made in their schedules prior to entering middle school.

The fourth expected outcome was that guidance department would respond that parents did have the opportunity to attend a parent information night prior to completing scheduling forms with their children.

Measurement of Outcomes

In order to measure the outcomes for this practicum, an interview would take place with the principal and the guidance department during the first quarter of the new academic year. (See Appendix D) The desired outcome for the principal interview was that the response would be given that articulation was no longer an area of need, but, was perceived as an area of strength.

The interview with the guidance department would reveal the number of students requesting schedule changes in the sixth grade class during the opening month of school would be reduced to twenty or less. This interview with the guidance department would also reveal that the parents did have the opportunity to attend an information night at the school prior to completing schedule forms with their child.

The final outcome measure for this practicum would include the administration of the post surveys for sixth grade students. (See Appendix E) Following the administration of this post survey, the responses to the question of feeling prepared to make scheduling choices would be tabulated. It was the goal of this practicum that those students who expressed that they felt unprepared to make scheduling choices would be reduced to twenty or less.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

Incoming students from the five feeder schools were receiving insufficient articulation from the new middle school to permit a smooth transition from the elementary school. This vulnerable and emotionally charged age group were entering into a new environment without preparation or assistance with the decisions that they were forced to make concerning their next level of education. In brief, the failure to establish articulation practices for students transferring from the elementary level to the middle school level was causing a stressful situation for both staff and students at the new middle school and the five elementary feeder schools.

School children experience more stress today than they ever have. This is due to changing family values and social pressure.

In order to help kids deal with stresses that are centered around decision making, it is suggested that educators must take an active role. We must help kids make more informed or better decisions. (Elkind, 1986)

The review of the literature gives evidence that a school that uses articulation practices can expect positive results for students when compared to similar schools which do not use articulation practices. Epstein and MacIver, (1990b), state that a school can expect at least one percent fewer students to be retained in their first year of middle school if articulation practices are used.

Common articulation practices include supplying program information to the elementary school, obtaining data on students entering, scheduling student visitation, parent visitation, teacher visitations and Middle School student visitation to the feeder schools. (Alexander & McEwin 1989a)

The state of Vermont boasts of joint workshops between middle grade teachers and their counterparts in elementary school where teachers share information about students' academic performance and school-related attitudes and behavior. (Allen, 1990)

The practice of fifth grade students attending a full day of school at the middle school level, while buddying up with a sixth grader is described as an opportunity for the fifth graders to have a reasonably accurate picture of middle schools. (Case, 1989)

While the concept of student visitation is extremely common, it has received some negative reviews. Student visitation was described as chaotic for elementary teachers, interruptive by middle school teachers, ineffective by counselors and confusing by students. (Glant, 1989) Effective, yet simple strategies suggested to avoid these results include staggering visitations so they coincide with field trips of large groups of the student body, so overcrowding is reduced. Buddying up with a member of the student body is also suggested as well as presenting slide shows of the middle school prior to the visit.

Description of Selected Solution

The selected solution included a multi-faceted approach, with the hopes of maximizing the opportunity of establishing a strong articulation program. By extending the entire sixth grade staff, as well as student involvement into the articulation process, it was hoped that responsibility for the task of articulation would not be placed on any one small segment of the staff, but rather a shared experience designed to not only benefit incoming students but also provide the opportunity for staff and the present student body members to experience pride in association with such a fine educational institution.

Report of Action Taken

While standard articulation practices of student visitation were put into place, which is the most commonly

described practice in the literature, the concept of buddying up with sixth grade students provided the personal aspect so frequently absent from the visitation experience. This creative twist to the visitation program added a positive dimension to this activity. Two separate student visitation days were scheduled, thereby reducing the number of visitors to a size which was manageable on the campus.

Twenty tour guides greeted the students upon their arrival and individually distributed their color coded stickers which corresponded to their group of ten for a tour group. Selection of tour guides was based on teacher nomination and student interest. Tour guides participated in two training sessions insuring their comprehension and the significance of their role in the process of acting as a good will ambassadors to the incoming students. Each tour guide received a personal badge with their name and official tour guide status, color coded stickers to distribute to their group members, and an itinerary to follow during the walking tour. Tour guides were invited to a thank you reception following the second visitation day.

Upon their arrival on the campus, tour guides escorted their individual groups into the auditorium. The students were greeted by the administration and guidance department in a large group setting of approximately 200 visitors.

Following the formal greeting, selected students in the eighth grade presented a slide tape presentation which

they had produced, highlighting the entire campus, sixth grade teachers and administration. The six minute show was accompanied by up beat musical selection.

As the slide tape presentation ended, the chorus director lead the entire chorus on to the stage and presented a brief concert. Chorus students wore their appropriate choir costumes. Following a chorus presentation, students who were members of the chorus as well as the chorus director, spoke directly to the students. A colorful handout detailing specifics concerning membership in chorus was distributed.

Tour guides escorted their tour groups for a thirty minute walking tour of the campus. Each groups itinerary varied, eliminating large numbers arriving at any location simultaneously. The walking tour was scheduled to avoid the student body change of classes, which can be rather disorienting even for the veteran students.

Upon returning to the auditorium, the band presented a brief performance on the stage. Both the band director and two student band members spoke to the incoming students concerning the requirements and advantages of joining band. A colorful handout reiterating the band requirements, as well as instrument rental information was distributed.

As a finale, selected eighth grade students presented a humorous skit for the visiting students. The purpose of the skit was to allay the fears of the students about some

common concerns associated with middle schools such as lockers, getting lost and showering for gym, in a humorous,yet, informative manner.

Prior to dismissal, an open question and answer session was provided to the visiting students. A colorful brochure designed by this writer containing student information such as bell schedules, school colors, and cafeteria rules, plus a pencil with the school logo, was distributed to the students as they departed the auditorium.

A parent information night for parents of incoming students was scheduled. This information night was attended by the sixth grade team teachers, exploratory teachers, administrators and the sixth grade guidance counselor. The meeting provided an opportunity for parents to meet the staff, and hear information on the team approach, rotation schedule, year round calendar, and exploratory classes.

Sixth grade students wrote personal pen pal letters to fifth grade students, expressing what their concerns were prior to entering middle school and how they dealt with them. It was hoped that the empathy conveyed by this activity would reduce the stress level on common areas of concern, such as getting lost and locker use.

The practice of guidance counselors speaking to guidance counselors was extended to include academic teachers. Fifth grade teachers were invited to visit with the sixth grade teachers on a student non-attendance day in

the Spring. By providing fifth grade teachers from the five feeder schools an opportunity to visit with the sixth grade teachers in a scheduled meeting, it was hoped that these two interested parties would share information necessary to provide for a smoother transition for the students concerned.

Parents of exceptional education students were invited to attend an information night. This meeting provided the parents of these students an opportunity to receive information on program opportunities for their children, as well as an opportunity to meet the staff of the exceptional education department, prior to selecting their sixth grade schedules. Since the students in the gifted program represented a high percentage of the students involved with the rescheduling problems of the previous year, it was hoped that by providing this population with the opportunity to receive additional programming information in this setting, the scheduling change requests would be greatly reduced.

An open house was scheduled prior to the opening day of school. This provided the students the opportunity to stroll about the campus at leisure without the large constraints of the school visitation experience. Since both schedules and maps of the school were made available during this open house, students had the opportunity to orient themselves in this stress free environment and, hopefully, benefit from the experience. This was scheduled the day

prior to the opening day of school. Teachers were in their classrooms during the visitation hours and parents and students had the opportunity to meet with the staff in a relaxed and positive setting.

Prior to the pre-opening day visitation, PTA contacted the individual teams of teachers within the site in order to obtain a school supply list. PTA organized the supply lists into team packets and sold the supplies during the open house session, again reducing the stress level on incoming students as to opening day requirements. Knowing what was expected of them, and having the required materials prior to arriving for the first day of formal class sessions eliminated a source of stress to the incoming students.

Invitations to attend the open house prior to the opening day of the 93-93 school year were mailed to the individual student's homes, with brief words of welcome, date and time of open house, as well as information concerning the opportunity to purchase school supplies during the open house session. By mailing this directly to the student, it was hoped that such a personal touch would result in replacing the feelings of anxiety for the incoming students at this point, with one of anticipation. Funding for this mailing was provided by administration.

An eight page handbook was designed by this writer with input from the staff, containing general information such as the school's history, year round schedules, rotation

of classes, and the team concept, as well as specific information, such as bell schedule and cafeteria prices. The booklet was for distribution to those parents who registered new students over the summer break and were therefore unable to attend the formal orientation meetings provided in the Spring.

During the opening week of school, teachers were encouraged to individually phone the parents of each student assigned to their homeroom. This brief conversation established a positive relationship before the academic year began. The simple context of the conversation was simply to introduce the teacher and to formally invite the parents to attend the parent night, scheduled during the opening weeks of the academic year.

An evening open house was scheduled during the second week of the school year. The parents were given the opportunity to follow their student's schedule for the evening. These ten minute classroom visits permitted the teachers the opportunity to clearly articulate grading policies, homework requirements, and general class rules.

By including the students, staff, administration, and the guidance department in this articulation process, it was hoped that incoming students would benefit. It was also the writer's hope that by including all staff members and the student body with the incoming students' articulation, staff members and the students at the site would experience a

sense of pride in being part of an excellent articulation program. Since the school was new, now was the time to establish that the shared vision of being the best begins with an outstanding articulation program.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The problem being addressed in this practicum was to provide a greater awareness of the expectations and choices of incoming sixth grade students as they began their middle school education through the development of an articulation program designed to meet the needs of incoming middle school students to the middle school.

Strategies used to implement a solution to this problem involved a multifaceted approach to designing an outstanding articulation program. The first focus of the implementation was to extend the role of articulation past that of the middle school guidance department. In the past history of the district's middle school's articulation, it was not unusual for articulation to consist of the middle school guidance counselor to shuffle paperwork from the elementary school guidance department. By involving the entire sixth

grade staff and the fifth grade staff from the five feeder schools, it was hoped that an improvement of past policies would have a positive impact on the quality of the total articulation program. It was also hoped that the resulting meeting of these of two groups would result in meaningful and on- going dialogue. The staff was also involved with supervising pen pal letters and personally contacting new parents via phone during the opening week of the 93-94 school year.

The second action was to extend the role of articulation to the student body at the middle school level. By presenting an opportunity for students to speak directly to students, not only would the incoming fifth grade students enjoy a more meaningful exchange, but the middle school students involved with the exchange would derive the added benefit of actively participating in a school program that had served a need within their community, while instilling pride to those students for association with an outstanding educational institution.

Students actively participated in the initial surveys, the pen pal letter writing campaign, served as tour guides, produced an original a slide tape presentation, prepared the skit for the incoming fifth grade students, and served as spokespersons and performers for both the band and chorus programs.

Parent involvement, an essential ingredient for any

school based program, was also included in the solution. A Spring parent orientation meeting for incoming fifth grade students was scheduled, a booklet was prepared for those parents who moved into the area over the Summer, a Special Education Parent Night was scheduled in the Spring, and an open house was scheduled prior to the opening day of school. The staff made personalized phone calls introducing themselves to parents during the opening week of school. Parents were also invited to attend the school and follow their student's schedule for an evening open house scheduled during the second week of the new school year. PTA members were contacted to organize the sale of school supplies during the summer visitation, prior to the opening day of school.

The incoming fifth grade students, who were the true beneficiaries of the strong articulation program each received a personal pen pal letter from a sixth grade students already at the school. They also were invited to attend a school wide visitation day while school was in session, and each student received a personal invitation via mail to attend the pre opening day orientation. The incoming students had the opportunity to hear both the band and choir perform and received detailed information on those class requirements both in terms of financial and time commitments for participation in these two exploratory classes. Each incoming student was also provided with a

handbook detailing pertinent information on their future school assignment.

Those students enrolled in the gifted program were encouraged to attend the Gifted Program information night, designed specifically for those students, as well as the parents of the students, who qualified for placement into gifted classes. Students and their parents met the staff involved with the gifted program, and were given detailed specifics as to their choices in participation in the middle school gifted program.

There were a total of four expected outcomes as a result of this practicum. The first one was that the principal, who in the fall of 1992 expressed articulation as a priority item of concern with feeder schools would no longer express this as a need, but would instead view the articulation used by this middle school as an area of strength. During the principal's last day of school presentation to the staff, he verbalized aloud to the staff that he indeed did view the articulation procedures that had been established as no longer an area of concern, but was now an area of strength.

The second expected outcome was that the guidance department would observe a decrease in the number of scheduling change requests by incoming sixth grade students. An interview with the guidance department yielded the following information. Of the 400 incoming sixth grade

students, 17 requested schedule changes.

(See Table 3).

Table 3

Results of Guidance Questionnaire For Schedule Change Request By Sixth Grade Students in 1993.

Total Schedule Requests made by Sixth Grade Students	Schedule Requests Made Involving Sixth Grade Band Students	Schedule Requests Made Involving Sixth Grade Chorus Students	Schedule Requests involving Sixth Grade Students in Gifted Classes	Schedule Requests involving Other Concerns
17	5	7	3	2

An analysis of the above survey results verifies that the original outcome goal which was to reduce the number of change requests to number less than 20 was met. While totally eliminating schedule change requests would have been an unreasonable goal considering the number and age of the students involved with the class decision process, the final survey revealed a very positive improvement over the previous year.

The third expected outcome was that the post survey,

administered to the new sixth grade students, would reflect a decrease in the number of students who responded that they felt unprepared for the choices that they made in their schedules prior to entering middle school. This survey was distributed during the fifth week of the 1993 school year during advisement class. Of the 400 student surveys distributed, 396 were returned. Results of the survey revealed that 15 students felt they were unprepared to make scheduling choices prior to entering middle school. (See Table 4).

Table 4

Results of Survey Completed By Sixth Grade Students on Scheduling Decisions They Made in Fifth Grade in 1993.

Total Number of Students Surveyed	Total Number of Sixth Grade Students Who Expressed They Felt Unprepared to Make Scheduling Choices Prior to Entering Middle School.
396	15

An analysis of the above table reveals that the original outcome goal, which was to reduce the total number of sixth grade students who expressed they felt unprepared to make scheduling choices prior to entering middle school to less than 20, was achieved.

The fourth expected outcome was that the guidance department would respond that parents did have the

opportunity to attend a parent information night prior to completing scheduling forms with their children. Since this writer was directly involved with the scheduling, organizing, and printing the agenda for the parent orientation night, it was unnecessary to verify the parent meeting with the guidance department through a formal interview. This writer personally was present at the well-attended parent information nights for both the incoming fifth grade students in regular education classes as well as the students in the gifted program.

Discussion

The goal of this practicum was to provide incoming sixth grade students entering the new middle school with a greater awareness of the expectations and choices of their middle school experience by establishing articulation practices. The outcome measures designed to measure the success or failure of meeting this goal reveals that all four of the goals were met.

The obvious advantages of a brand new school with the synergy of a new staff made implementation of establishing articulation practices extremely satisfying. No one could possibly utter the words "that's not the way we used to do it." Also, having staff reply to requests such as having their advisement students write pen pal letters with , "What a neat idea!", made the entire process flow with a more

positive sense of cooperation than originally anticipated. Attaining the support of the administration was equally uncomplicated. Since the administration expressed that the issue of articulation was an area of concern prior to the implementation, there was sense of appreciation on the part of administration that was felt by this writer that was gratifying to experience.

One unanticipated outcome that resulted was the recognition and honor that the students received who actively produced the slide tape presentation. While they did the presentation in response to a request, the final product was far superior than anticipated. The students involved were awarded first place prize for the school media competition and advanced to the county level. There, they were awarded second place prize for their efforts. Involving students in a project that has a real audience and which addresses a need in their community, is a constant search for the middle school teacher. By allowing students to be actively part of the articulation process, a large number of students may be involved in this real life situation so the beneficiaries are both the audience and the students who are actively involved with the articulation activities.

Recommendations

Schools in need of improving present articulation practices, as well as those school who are in need of establishing articulation practices, particularly at the middle school level,

need to extend the responsibilities of the articulation process to include not only the guidance department but also the staff, administration, student body and parents. The reality is that articulation has many stakeholders. Each group within a school benefits from their active participation of meaningful articulation practices.

While it is unrealistic to anticipate that schedule change requests will be eliminated by employing strong articulation practices, the staff should experience a sufficient decrease in this problem to justify their support. Everyone involved in the beginning of the new school year appreciates successful proven methods of guaranteeing a smooth opening day. By following the guidelines set forth here in this practicum, the practitioner has the blueprint for a successful articulation program which, once established, may be replicated annually with little effort. Since copies of all of the printed materials such as the parent booklets, invitations and orientation handouts may all be saved on disks, it is simply a matter of entering into those programs for annual updates.

At a time when budgetary concerns effect so many decisions within schools, establishing quality articulation practices is a cost efficient tool with a high rate of success. By employing meaningful articulation practices into the school calendar, the reduction of student scheduling change requests as well as a more prepared and confident incoming group of students will result in smooth beginning of the new school year. Having witnessed the metamorphosis of disoriented sixth graders into smiling students with the look of anticipation, convinced this writer that today's middle school students deserve in depth articulation practices.

Dissemination

A completed copy of this practicum will be forwarded to the Director of Middle School's within the writer's district. It is hoped that by disseminating the results at that level, the policies and procedures described within this practicum will be applied to the larger audience of the eight middle schools serving the district.

An abbreviated form of this practicum will be forwarded to the publishers of Teacher's Magazine and Middle School Journal, with the hopes of publishing the results to a national audience.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION

Interview Questions for Guidance Department Prior to Implementation

What is the total number of students in the sixth grade class?

How many schedule change requests did you receive during the opening weeks of this calendar year?

Was there a particular population of students that were making these requests, or was there no observable pattern?

If there was an observable pattern in schedule change request population, what was it?

Did parents have an opportunity to meet with the members of the middle school staff prior to the opening of the school year?

Appendix B

Pre Survey of sixth grade students

PRE SURVEY OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

Did you feel prepared for the choices you made in your schedule before you started sixth grade at Indian Trails Middle School?

yes no

Was it necessary for your schedule to be changed this year?

yes no

The following topics are often areas of concern for students entering middle school. Using this scale, please circle the number that best describes your feelings before entering middle school.

1=no problem 2=slightly worried about 3=very worried about

dressing out for gym	1	2	3
seven teachers	1	2	3
lockers	1	2	3
getting lost	1	2	3
being late for class	1	2	3
eighth graders	1	2	3
amount of homework	1	2	3
report card grades	1	2	3
making friends	1	2	3

Appendix C

Recommendations from Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century

Recommendations from Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.

1. Create small communities for learning where stable, close mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual and personal growth.

2. Teach a core academic program that results in students who are literate, including in the sciences, and who know how to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society.

3. Ensure success for all students through elimination of tracking by achievement level along with promotion of cooperative learning, and flexibility in arranging instructional time.

4. Empower teachers and administrators to make decisions about the experiences of middle grade students through creative control by teachers over the instructional program.

5. Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents and who have been specifically prepared for assignment to the middle grades.

6. Improve academic performance through fostering the health and fitness of young adolescents by providing a health coordinator in every middle grade school access to health care and counseling services, and a health promoting schools environment.

7. Re-engage families in the education of young adolescents by giving them meaningful roles in school governance, communicating with families about the school program and students' progress, and offering families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at the school.

8. Connect school with communities, which together share responsibility for each middle grade students's success, through identifying service opportunities in the community, establishing partnerships and collaborations to ensure students' access to health and social services, and using community resources to enrich the instructional program and opportunities for constructive after-school activities.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION

Post Practicum Interview Questions for Guidance Department

What is the total number of students in the sixth grade class?

How many schedule change requests did you receive during the opening weeks of this calendar year?

Was there a particular population of students that were making these requests, or was there no observable pattern?

If there was an observable pattern in schedule change request population, what was it?

Did parents have an opportunity to meet with the members of the middle school staff prior to the opening of the school year?

APPENDIX E

POST SURVEY OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

POST SURVEY OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

Did you feel prepared for the choices you made in your schedule before you started sixth grade at Indian Trails Middle School?

yes no

Was it necessary for your schedule to be changed this year?

yes no

The following topics are often areas of concern for students entering middle school. Using this scale, please circle the number that best describes your feelings before entering middle school.

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being late for class	1	2	3
eighth graders	1	2	3
amount of homework	1	2	3
report card grades	1	2	3
making friends	1	2	3